

Ethnotourism Villages and Tourist Neighborhoods of the Bukhara Oasis

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the ethnotourism potential of villages and tourist neighborhoods in the Bukhara oasis, situating them within the broader historical, cultural, and socio-economic landscape of Central Asia. Drawing upon fieldwork, archival research, and ethnographic observation, it explores how traditional practices such as pottery, gold embroidery, carpet weaving, felt making, and folk gastronomy—are preserved and revitalized through tourism. Special attention is given to Shirin village, Qo'rg'on neighborhood, and Jogare Arab village, as well as the Jongeldi Kazakh settlement in the Kyzylkum desert, each of which demonstrates a unique interplay between heritage conservation and modern service provision. By analyzing community-based initiatives, state-supported projects, and the integration of intangible cultural heritage into tourist experiences, the article reveals how ethnotourism fosters economic diversification, job creation, and intercultural dialogue while simultaneously strengthening local identity. It also underscores challenges such as infrastructure limitations, cultural commodification, and the need for sustainable strategies in fragile desert-pasture landscapes. The study contributes to scholarship on cultural and historical tourism in Uzbekistan by documenting living traditions, mapping ethnically diverse settlements, and proposing development pathways that balance authenticity with innovation. Its findings are significant for policymakers, scholars of tourism and heritage studies, and practitioners seeking to promote inclusive, community-driven models of tourism that safeguard traditions while supporting socio-economic resilience in rural and desert regions.

Keywords: Ethnotourism; Bukhara Oasis; Cultural Heritage; Tourism Villages; Handicrafts; Sustainable Tourism; Community-Based Tourism; Intercultural Dialogue; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Central Asia.

1. Introduction

The article provides a scholarly analysis of the tourism villages and tourist neighborhoods of the Bukhara oasis, the material and spiritual culture of the people residing there, the potential of ethnotourism villages, and the directions of services offered to tourists.

1.1. Study Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

1) to analyze the role of ethnotourism villages in preserving cultural heritage, 2) to assess the socio-economic impact of tourism neighborhoods on local communities, 3) to document traditional handicrafts and practices in the Bukhara oasis, 4) to identify challenges and opportunities for sustainable ethnotourism, 5) to examine intercultural dialogue fostered through tourism activities, and 6) to propose strategies for enhancing tourist services in rural areas.

2. Methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative and historical research methods to analyze the ethnotourism villages and neighborhoods of the Bukhara oasis. Primary data were gathered through field observations, structured interviews, and questionnaires with local residents and artisans. Secondary sources included archival records, published ethnographic works, and governmental reports. Comparative and mapping techniques were applied to document spatial distribution and cultural practices. Retrospective analysis helped trace historical continuity, while systematic evaluation identified socio-economic and cultural impacts. The mixed approach ensured a

comprehensive understanding of ethnotourism's role in preserving intangible heritage and fostering sustainable development in the region.

3. Discussion

In the Bukhara oasis, the “Shirin” ethnotourism village (Vobkent District), the “Qo‘rg‘on” tourism neighborhood (G‘ijduvon District), the “Sheykhon” and “Jo‘yi Mo‘liyon” ethnotourism centers (Bukhara District), and the “Bo‘rontepa” tourism clusters have been established. In the village of Shirin, which has a history of 1,500 years, traditional handicrafts such as pottery, embroidery, gold embroidery, carpet weaving, quilt making, blacksmithing, wood carving, wool spinning, fabric weaving, national doll making, miniature art, basket weaving, and the ancient method of felt making continue to this day.

Vobkent District of Bukhara Region was established in the 1920s. The district has 44 neighborhoods [2], among which the village of Shirin specializes in ethnotourism. In this area, where ancient customs and traditions are being revived, activities such as grinding wheat and barley flour in an old stone mill and preparing traditional dishes in large cauldrons have been introduced. In the village, the preparation of “sho‘rdanak”, sweets, confectionery, and handicraft products, as well as beekeeping, are considered ancestral occupations passed down from generation to generation. In addition, services for tourists such as ancient “sandal” houses, the production of farming tools and equipment, and horseback or camel rides have been introduced. The ethnotourism village also features a museum of ancient items reflecting rural life and corners dedicated to traditional handicrafts.

4. Results

In the Shirin ethnotourism village, more than twenty guest houses, nearly ten handicraft centers, over twenty trade and public catering outlets, and around thirty services such as fishing, “halvopazlik” (halva making), and “sho‘rdanak” preparation are being established. The tourism village is creating 300 jobs. On November 29, 2024, the Qo‘rg‘on neighborhood of G‘ijduvon District was granted the status of a “tourism neighborhood”. The word “Qo‘rg‘on” means “fortified castle”, “protected”, or “guarded house”. The G‘ijduvon fortress is surrounded by the Pirmast canal, and access to it is provided by three bridges. In ancient times, entry and exit were through drawbridges that could be opened and closed. The area has a long history, and archaeologists have recently discovered remains of the ancient mud-brick walls of the Qo‘rg‘on. The G‘ijduvon fortress is located along the Great Silk Road and was already recorded in the 10th century among the major cities of Central Asia, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Shahrisabz, and at that time was recognized as the northern capital of Bukhara. The neighborhood, resembling a labyrinth, consists of eight narrow streets (Pirmast, Arabon, Ibodullo Narzullayev, Kosibon, Qassoboni Bolo, Alisher Navoiy, Shokirobod, Shaykh Tojiddin). Covering an area of 18 hectares, it is home to a total of 3,777 residents belonging to Uzbek, Tajik, Russian, Armenian, Tatar, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz nationalities. The neighborhood, which has 512 households, can be accessed through 13 roads.

Today, all 75 existing neighborhoods in G‘ijduvon originated from the Qo‘rg‘on area. The neighborhood borders Chorsu, F. Khojayev, and A. G‘ijduvoni neighborhoods. Almost all residents of the neighborhood have a specific occupation and make their living from handicrafts and the service sector.

The neighborhood specializes in 47 types of handicrafts, including cradle making, quilt making, gold embroidery, patchwork, tinsmithing, blacksmithing, and confectionery. In Qo'rg'on, the eighth generation of knife makers and the seventh generation of halva makers continue their crafts. In this historic neighborhood, life begins at three in the morning. At the cream market, milk and dairy products, as well as bakers' "shirmoy" flatbreads, "patir", and "tandir" bread, are in high demand.

In G'ijduvon cuisine, "shashlik", "sikh kebab", "tuxum oshi" (tuxumbarak), "halim", "shirgurunch" (rice pudding), cream, "sochli holva", and "o'moch" hold a special place [3]. Tourists are offered 19 types of pastries. The gastronomic street, consisting of 14 households along the Pirmast canal, is arranged in the style of an oriental market with stalls, shaded by reed canopies. At Alisher Narzullayev's home, a guesthouse, a pottery home museum, and a workshop are in operation. In G'ijduvon, two folklore ensembles present performances for tourists, showcasing "qayroqbozi" and "zangbozi" dances, as well as historical stage acts.

To transform Qo'rg'on into a tourism neighborhood, 34 billion soums were allocated from the state budget. The neighborhood's historical appearance will be restored, and its eight stone-paved streets will be renovated.

In the Bukhara oasis, 35 place names with Arabic origins have been preserved [4]. However, the only village in the oasis inhabited by Arabs is Jogare. In 1929, N.N. Burikin and M.M. Izmailov, who conducted an expedition to areas inhabited by Arabs, also recorded Jogare as a village that had preserved the Arabic language. Jogare is located 35 km from the city of Bukhara and 3 km from the center of the nearby Bobkent District. The area includes three Arab villages Jogare, Shohambek, and Arabxona [5].

In the village, located in G'ijduvon District, there are a total of 400 households and 10,000 residents. The Arab men of Jogare traditionally engaged in livestock breeding, shepherding, and leather tanning in the Kokcha and Zafarobod deserts. In general, the villagers were well-versed in selling felt, as well as in livestock breeding and trade. Even today, the men of the villages continue the dynasties of herders, carrying on their ancestral occupation. For example, one can cite the lineage of the Yorov herders: Yorbobo – Tohirbobo – Ramazonbobo – Raxmatillo – Ibod – Nasullo – Qahhor. The wells dug by herders in the deserts have been used under their own names, such as Yorquduq and Mustaqimquduq. Women engaged in various types of handicrafts, including "paytoba" weaving ("paytoba boftan"), "qalami boftan", saddlebag weaving ("xo'rjin bofi"), rope making ("respon bofi"), "ayl" weaving, and "chakmon" weaving [6].

Some traditions of the Jogare Arabs have been preserved, such as maslahat oshi, rais chaqirdi, nahor oshi, xesh tanishi, kelin biyoron, domod salom, xinobandon, and xona ko'ch ceremonies. In their national cuisine, dishes such as go'ja, alaf sho'la, arzan palov, piyoba, sug'mon, qayish, qotur, zog'ora non, o'rama, pechak somsa, ismaloq somsa, ko'kat somsa, o'moch, and shirgurunch hold a central place. Herders' meals such as ko'moch and talpa were also prepared.

The people of Jogare show respect for their fellow villagers by adding the prefix "bo" to their names, for example, Boqurbon, Bomurod, Bohikmat, Bomustaqim, and others. Although the village's wedding ceremonies, customs, and traditions have blended with Uzbek and Tajik culture, they have nevertheless preserved the ancient Arabic language well in everyday communication.

In order to develop tourism in the remote areas of the Bukhara oasis, ethnotourism centers are being established in villages inhabited by representatives of various ethnic groups. There are five remote areas in Bukhara Region: Sharof Rashidov neighborhood (Shofirkon District), Gazli and Qizilravot neighborhoods (Romitan City), Ko'kcha neighborhood (G'ijduvon District), and Jongeldi neighborhood (Peshku District) are among them.

At present, the material and intangible resources of desert-pasture zone landscapes are being utilized in 37 sectors. One of these is desert tourism, which includes ethnotourism, familiarizing visitors with the lives of people living in remote desert areas. Bukhara Region is one of the desert regions of our country. Nearly 90% of the region's territory is occupied by the Kyzylkum Desert. The settlements in the desert areas of Bukhara Region are mainly located along the 200 km Gazli–Svetushiy–Jongeldi–Churuq–Gazli loop. This desert loop is situated 72 km from the city of Bukhara. [7].

The Jongeldi Kazakh village is located 250 km from the city of Bukhara and 200 km from the center of Peshku District. The village can be reached from the A-380 “G‘uzor–Bukhara–Nukus–Beyneu” highway via the 4-R 48 road. In the villages of Jongeldi, Xalata, Qal'a Ota, and Safron, which are part of the Jongeldi ethnotourism neighborhood, there are 162 households belonging to 209 families of Kazakh and Turkmen nationality. The villages are located about 100 km apart from each other. The village, with a total population of 765 people, covers an area of 750 hectares and was established in 1931. Kazakh clans settled in this location in the 1930s. The total population of Jongeldi village is around 200 people. The local residents, living in the lowlands along the northwestern foothills of the Quljuqtov Mountains across the vast Kyzylkum steppes, are mainly engaged in shepherding, livestock breeding, horse breeding, and, to some extent, farming. Each household owns at least 10–15 sheep and goats, as well as cattle, horses, and camels. The desert land consists of grayish-brown sandy soils, takyr, and saline soils. Every year, from May to September, yurts are set up in the villages, and livestock, camels, and horses are tended in the desert. This area is considered one of the main centers of karakul sheep breeding in Uzbekistan. The Jongeldi Karakul Sheep Breeding and Pedigree State Farm is located here. In the past, young men used to twist ropes from wool and yarn, while girls would sew quilts and embroider suzani.

In the national cuisine, “beshbarmq” and “kymyz” (fermented mare's milk) hold a special place. Beshbarmq, like pilaf for Uzbeks, is considered a royal dish and a symbol of hospitality. The name “beshbarmq” literally means “finely chopped pieces of meat served with dough in broth”. In Kyrgyz, another name for beshbarmq is “turalgan et”, which translates to “minced or chopped meat”. Two hours earlier, dough is prepared and cut into strips like ribbons before being added to boiling water. Goat meat, especially camel meat, is boiled for at least 2–3 hours until fully cooked. Beshbarmq is a dish of Central Asian cuisine and is known by different names in various regions: “norin” in Xinjiang, “turama” or “dograma” in Karakalpakstan, the North Caucasus, and Turkmenistan, and “kullama” in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan.

Among beverages, it is worth noting the medicinal drink “qimron” made from camel's milk. In regions where camels are raised, among Kazakhs, Turkmens, and Karakalpaks, it is often prepared as a thirst-quenching drink in desert conditions. Due to its higher fat content, it is considered thicker than “kumis”. As a medicinal drink, it has especially been used in the treatment of diabetes [8].

Among the ceremonies are “bride kidnapping”, “kelin salom” (bride’s greeting), “drinking tea served by the bride”, “qiz uzatu” (bride’s farewell), “beshik toy” (cradle ceremony), “tusau keser” (rope-cutting ceremony), and “shildekhana” (postnatal celebration). Traditional games include “asyk onau” (knucklebone game), “arkan tartys” (tug-of-war), “kush synasu” (test of strength), and “qara jorga” (black pacer horse show). National sports feature “kures” (wrestling), the desert game “kokpar” (goat dragging on horseback), and camel riding tours for tourists.

5. Conclusion

By including the Jongeldi Kazakh village in the ethnographic tourism route, tourists will have the following opportunities:

- 1) riding camels in the ethnographic tourism area, sunbathing on the sand, and observing wind-formed sand dunes and shifting sands;
- 2) getting acquainted with the lifestyle of the local population in the Jongeldi village located in the desert zone;
- 3) discovering the local cuisine and national dishes;
- 4) taking part in master classes on preparing various dishes from sheep and goat meat, as well as from camel milk.

The ethnic landscape of the Bukhara oasis is diverse and colorful. Ethnic groups have preserved their cultural traditions. It is possible to establish tourism centers in neighborhoods and villages inhabited by Turkmens, Tajiks, Iranians, and Jews. Such tourist locations serve important purposes, such as preserving the customs and traditions of these ethnic groups, passing them on in their entirety to future generations, fostering intercultural dialogue to promote tolerance, and contributing to closer relations between people.

6. Future Suggestions

- 1) Encourage community-based tourism initiatives.
- 2) Promote digital documentation of intangible cultural heritage.
- 3) Develop training programs for local tour guides.
- 4) Enhance infrastructure in ethnotourism villages.
- 5) Foster international collaboration in cultural tourism projects.
- 6) Integrate eco-tourism with ethnotourism for sustainable outcomes.

Declarations

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Consent for publication

The author declares that he/she consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

Author's independent contribution.

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